

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY / MIDDLE EAST UPDATE
February 21 - 27, 2013

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1. Kerry Confers in France on Trade, Climate, Mideast, Mali (02-27-2013)

By Phillip Kurata
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State John Kerry and French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius have voiced support for the proposed free-trade agreement between the United States and the European Union.

“The Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership that President Obama just announced is really an exciting opportunity for all of us,” Kerry said at a press conference with Fabius in Paris February 27. “It’s a moment where fair and free trade can kick into gear economic growth, restore competitiveness, create millions of jobs on both sides of the Atlantic and provide us the strength that we seek and the quality of life for our citizens.”

Fabius called the prospect of an agreement an “excellent thing” and said the Europeans will pay close attention to issues such as agriculture, opening of public markets, intellectual property and audiovisual services.

Kerry noted that the European Union is the largest trading partner of the United States, and economic strength on both sides of the Atlantic will help both in facing the challenge of climate change.

“We have a responsibility to leave our children and our grandchildren a healthier planet,” Kerry said. He said “smart investments” in energy-efficient technology will create good jobs, new cars, new railways, new houses and new industries.

“The energy marketplace that stares at us as the solution to climate is a \$6 trillion market with 4 to 5 billion users today, and that will grow to 9 trillion dollars over the course of the next 40 or so years. This is the future, and it’s important for us to grab it,” Kerry said.

The secretary expressed U.S. appreciation for French action in Mali to preserve the country’s territorial integrity and stop terrorists from establishing a base in the northern region.

Fabius thanked the United States for its political and logistical support for its operations in Mali, saying, “When France and the United States commit together, they can change things.”

With regard to Syria, Kerry and Fabius repeated their support for the Syrian opposition council and coalition and condemned what Kerry called “the Assad regime’s criminal behavior.”

“We all agree that time has passed for President Assad to heed the voice of his people and the voice of the people in the world who want a peaceful transition and a new opportunity for Syria. That’s why we are examining and developing ways to accelerate the political transition that the Syrian people seek and deserve,” Kerry said.

With regard to the Iran nuclear issue, Kerry said the talks in Almaty, Kazakhstan, involving Iran on one hand and the United States, Britain, China, France, Russia and Germany on the other were “useful.”

“If Iran engages seriously, and we hope they will, then these could pave the way for negotiations that lead towards a longer-term and comprehensive agreement,” Kerry said.

The international community has imposed biting sanctions on Iran to pressure the country to comply with its obligations under the nonproliferation treaty.

Kerry said the partnership between the United States and France runs deeper than the day-to-day issues he discussed with Fabius. “This really is a partnership that has withstood the test of time, and there is no doubt that it will continue to serve as the cornerstone of our collective security and our shared prosperity.”

2. U.S. Air Force Airmen Arrive for First Stay in Poland (02-26-2013)

By Katrina Cheesman
Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany

Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany — The first rotation of U.S. Air Force aircraft and airmen to the Poland Aviation Detachment (Av-Det) arrived at Powidz Air Base, Poland, on February 22.

For this first rotation, a number of C-130J Hercules cargo aircraft and 66 personnel from the 37th Airlift Squadron at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, are training with the Polish Air Force at Powidz from February 22 to March 9.

While types of U.S. aircraft will vary, up to 200 uniformed military personnel and civilian contractors will rotate on a quarterly basis. This increased cooperation between the two nations will strengthen interoperability for NATO allies through regular training exercises.

The Av-Det is officially Detachment 1 of the U.S. Air Force's 52nd Operations Group at Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany.

The Av-Det was activated in November 2012 and marked the first enduring presence of U.S. military members on Polish soil. The Av-Det makes it possible for Poland to host other allied air force elements and to serve as a regional hub for air training and multinational exercises.

"We're going to see for the first time the fruits of our labor," Major Matthew Spears, Detachment 1 commander, said on the occasion of the first aircraft and personnel arrival. "Having the 37th Airlift Squadron deploy, execute, and redeploy successfully will bring a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment to the members of the Av-Det."

Although U.S. Air Force aircraft have trained previously in Poland, this first rotation differs from other occasions. "The Av-Det focuses on opportunities to engage with the Polish Air Force on all fronts," said Spears. "The Av-Det seeks to increase interoperability, not just with our aircrews but across the entire spectrum of both air forces' capabilities."

3. Kerry Condemns Syrian Rocket Attacks on Aleppo (02-25-2013)

Washington — Secretary of State John Kerry said the Syrian government's brutal Scud missile attacks on the city of Aleppo are "the latest example" of the brutality of Bashar al-Assad's regime and said the Obama administration and other countries will be meeting in Rome later in the week to determine how to help Assad "change his calculation" in order to end the violence and move toward a peaceful political transition.

Speaking with British Foreign Secretary William Hague in London February 25, Kerry said the United States condemns the "indiscriminate killing of innocent civilians" that took the lives of several dozen people in Aleppo February 22 "in the strongest terms" and said "it is just further evidence that Assad has to go."

He noted that Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem spoke recently in Russia about "human rights abuses" and dialogue with the Syrian opposition, but said it is "pretty hard to understand how, when you see these Scuds falling on the innocent people of Aleppo, it's possible to take their notion that they're ready to have a dialogue very seriously."

Kerry is on his first international trip since becoming secretary of state. He is scheduled to visit nine nations between February 24 and March 6. Following the United Kingdom, the secretary will travel to Germany, France, Italy, Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

The United States and the United Kingdom agree that the Syrian people "simply want an ability to have their government be accountable and to be able to be part of the governance of their own lives," and that they "deserve better than the horrific violence that now invades and threatens their everyday lives," Kerry said.

When the United States joins other countries and the Syrian opposition council in Rome, "we are not coming ... simply to talk," he said. "We are coming to Rome to make a decision about next steps and perhaps even other options."

He said it will be important to hear directly from the Syrian opposition "to know precisely what they think would be most useful at this point in time, how we may be able to make a difference."

The United States continues to advocate a political solution to the conflict, which has killed more than 70,000 Syrians since March 2011. Kerry said that is the best way to save lives, minimize the conflict's disruption to Syria's neighbors and "maximize the possibilities of all people being represented appropriately in a democratic process."

Foreign Secretary Hague said that so long as a political solution remains "blocked off" by the Assad regime and in the U.N. Security Council, the international community has a responsibility to take steps designed to prevent the loss of life in Syria, and he said the United Kingdom plans additional contributions to humanitarian relief efforts there.

In a February 24 statement, State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said so far the United States has contributed \$385 million in humanitarian aid to help Syrian refugees and citizens inside Syria who have been displaced by the Assad regime's violence.

"We also have helped local administrative councils, provincial revolution councils and the local coordination committees organize themselves to play their vital role in the revolution," she said.

"HISTORIC" U.S.-EU TRADE AGREEMENT IN THE WORKS

Kerry said he and Hague also discussed the proposed U.S.-European Union Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, which would boost economic ties among the world's two largest trading partners.

Kerry said "an historic agreement is in its beginnings" ahead of talks on the deal between U.S. and E.U. officials, which are expected to begin in June.

"Europe freestanding alone is the largest economy in the world. And when you join that together with the United States of America, we have a powerful ability to be able to affect the rules of the road and to be able to raise standards and, most importantly, create jobs for all of our people," he said.

Hague said the agreement would not only support jobs and economic growth across the Atlantic, but would also give "a much-needed boost to the world economy."

4. Obama, Abe Discuss Security, Economic Issues (02-22-2013)

By Jane Morse
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama and Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe met at the White House February 22 to discuss security and economic issues.

During a short press briefing after their meeting in the Oval Office, Obama told reporters that the two leaders had "close consultations on a wide range of security issues, in particular our concerns about the provocative actions that have been taken in North Korea and our determination to take strong actions in response."

North Korea launched a rocket December 11 that was successful in advancing its missile program. The White House immediately issued a statement calling the launch "a highly provocative act" that

threatened regional security, violated several U.N. Security Council resolutions, contravened North Korea's international obligations and undermined the global nonproliferation regime.

Abe, speaking through an interpreter at the February 22 press briefing, said: "We just cannot tolerate the actions of North Korea, such as launching missiles and conducting nuclear tests. So we agreed that we would cooperate with each other in dealing resolutely with North Korea."

In response to questions, Abe said he and the president agreed "that it was important for Japan and the United States to not provide rewards to North Korea for their actions, such as launching missiles and conducting nuclear tests." He added: "We agreed that we would cooperate so that a resolution, including sanctions, would be adopted in the U.N. We also discussed additional sanctions; for example, financial sanctions. And we agreed to continue cooperating in that regard as well."

Acknowledging that the security environment in the Asia-Pacific region is becoming "more and more difficult," Abe said: "We need to create an order in this region, based on cooperation between our two countries, to secure the freedom of the seas and to secure a region which is governed based on laws, not on force."

Obama said he and the prime minister would continue their talks later that day, this time to discuss economic cooperation between the two countries.

"I know that Prime Minister Abe and I both agree," Obama said, "that our Number 1 priority has to be making sure that we are increasing growth and making sure that people have the opportunity to prosper if they're willing to work hard, in both our countries."

Trade investment in Japan currently supports 1 million jobs in the United States, according to U.S. officials.

See the White House response to North Korea's missile launch on the [White House website](#).

5. [NATO Secretary-General Pledges New Afghan Mission Post-2014 \(02-22-2013\)](#)

By Karen Parrish
American Forces Press Service

Brussels — The NATO secretary-general pledged "a new and different NATO-led mission after 2014" in Afghanistan.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen spoke February 22 to open the session of NATO and non-NATO troop-contributing nations here on the last day of a two-day NATO defense ministers meeting. The International Security Assistance Force mission in Afghanistan will end late in 2014, when Afghan forces will have assumed security responsibility for their nation's people, he said.

"But our partnership with Afghanistan will continue well beyond the end of transition and the end of our ISAF mission. ... I am pleased that many partners have already offered to join us and are working with us to plan the new mission," Rasmussen said.

NATO and its ISAF partner nations remain resolute in their support for a sovereign, safe and secure Afghanistan, the secretary-general said.

In a news conference here February 21, Rasmussen noted that while the alliance plans a follow-on mission in Afghanistan, it also is focused on maintaining and building on the capabilities it has gained through two decades of operations from Kosovo to Afghanistan to Libya. Over the next decade, NATO must preserve and pass on those skills, he said, “as our biggest operation comes closer to completion.”

The secretary-general said the alliance has adopted the “connected forces” initiative to expand education and training and enhance exercises.

“Today we took an important step forward in that initiative,” Rasmussen said at the news conference. “We agreed on its goals, and asked our military experts to come up with concrete proposals on how to put them into practice.”

NATO’s goal for the initiative, he said, is to hold “more ambitious” military training exercises, with a broader range of scenarios, more often.

“The initiative will include a comprehensive training plan out to 2020, to make sure that our exercises are coherent, comprehensive, and cover the full range of alliance missions,” Rasmussen said. “It will include, in 2015, a major live exercise — that is, one involving significant numbers of deployed forces, not just command and staff units.”

The NATO Response Force will be the core of the connected forces initiative, he said.

“And we will build on its exercises — for example, by including the battalion which the United States government has pledged to rotate through Europe for precisely this purpose, and by building in more contributions from other allies and partners,” Rasmussen said. This will make the response force “a cooperation school, as well as a quick-reaction tool — an immediate resource, but also an investment in the future,” he added.

Rasmussen said NATO also is working to use its common funding, which comes from member nations’ budgets, for high-priority missions that include training, rapid response, and improving intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities.

“Over the coming months, we will make those improvements so that every dollar and every euro we spend is well spent,” he said.

The secretary-general acknowledged that multinational cooperation doesn't solve all of NATO’s problems and is not a response to all of its challenges.

“We also need a sufficient level of defense investment,” he said. “And that's my major concern — that if cuts continue, it will damage severely our ability to meet and address the future security challenges.”

NATO officials said February 21 they are discussing a proposal to maintain Afghan army and police forces at 352,000 combined members after 2014, when a previous plan had called for reducing the number to some 240,000.

“Let me stress that no final decisions have been made,” the secretary-general said at the news conference. “But I can confirm that it's one of the ideas that is being considered. I feel confident that we will be able to finance Afghan security forces of that size.”

The international community has pledged to help in financing those forces, he added, "because a security force of that size goes well beyond the financial capacity of the Afghan government."

Rasmussen said NATO alone should not bear the cost for Afghan forces. "This is actually a responsibility for the whole of the international community," he said. "And that has been confirmed at international conferences."

Rasmussen noted the proposal makes sense both politically and economically.

"It's better to give the defense of Afghanistan an Afghan face," he said. "And from an economic point of view, it is actually less expensive to finance Afghan security forces than to deploy foreign troops."

6. Panetta: Final Drawdown to Begin After Afghan Elections (02-22-2013)

By Karen Parrish
American Forces Press Service

BRUSSELS, Feb. 22, 2013 – The United States will maintain more than 60,000 troops in Afghanistan through the spring and summer fighting season, cutting to 34,000 by February and staying at that strength through the Afghan elections set for 2014, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta said here today.

"Once those elections are completed, we will then begin the final drawdown," Panetta said during a news conference at NATO headquarters after two days of NATO defense minister meetings.

President Barack Obama announced during his State of the Union address earlier this month that the United States will withdraw 34,000 troops -- about half its current strength -- from Afghanistan in the next 12 months.

The secretary said the current International Security Assistance Force mission and the follow-on NATO mission in Afghanistan were the central topic of group meetings and his own one-on-one discussions with allied and partner ministers here this week.

"There is a strong consensus that our mission is succeeding ... on the ground because of the growing role and capabilities that all of us have seen in the Afghan national security forces," Panetta said.

Afghan army and police units are on track to step into the lead for all operations this spring, he added.

NATO defense ministers today agreed to begin planning for a follow-on alliance mission after Afghan forces take over security responsibility for their nation, Panetta said.

"There are a range of options on NATO's post-2014 posture that would provide for an effective regional presence," he said. That presence would be placed not only in Kabul, the secretary added, but also in nodes around the country.

As the United States plans for its own Afghan troop presence after 2014, “we will continue to work closely with ISAF nations, particularly other regional lead nations, to ... discuss options,” Panetta said.

“Our goal is, obviously, to ensure the success of this new mission and the long-term stability of Afghanistan,” he added, and he praised the “extraordinary unity, strength and resolve of ISAF” in reaching this transition point.

The secretary said he and his counterparts also discussed the number of Afghan troops that will be needed to assure their nation’s security in the years after the transition. A previous plan had set the number of Afghan forces after 2014 at 240,000, but it now makes sense to consider maintaining the Afghan surge strength of 352,000 through 2018, he said.

Panetta said supporting that level of Afghan troops is “an investment that would be worth making, because it would allow us greater flexibility as we take down our troops.”

The secretary said his father used to quote an Italian phrase that translates: “Step by step, you’ll go a long way.”

“I think that’s probably great advice for all of us as we approach this final period, hopefully, in the completion of the mission ... in Afghanistan,” he added.

Panetta also touched on the threat of terrorism and cyberattacks, warning that NATO must commit to acting together if member nations hope to confront such challenges.

These 21st-century challenges require the response that only a strong NATO alliance can bring, the secretary said. Between shrinking European defense budgets and political gridlock in the United States, he said, “I do fear that the alliance will soon be, if it is not already, stretched too thin.”

The secretary said he asked a question of his fellow ministers this week: “Will we let our nations retreat from our responsibilities in the face of growing budget constraints, or will we demonstrate the kind of creativity, innovation and political will to develop and share the capabilities we must have?”

Panetta praised NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen’s leadership in guiding the alliance’s growth through efforts such as the new “connected forces” initiative, which will use the NATO Response Force as the core for multinational training and operations within the alliance after Afghanistan deployments wind down.

Such initiatives are “critical to ensuring the readiness of the alliance, which has to be the top priority in an unpredictable and crisis-prone world,” Panetta said.

The secretary also thanked Rasmussen for announcing that cyber threats will be a central topic the next time NATO defense ministers meet.

Cyber is “without question, the battlefield of the future, and it’s an area that NATO needs to pay attention to,” Panetta said.

The NATO alliance was built on 20th-century conflicts, Panetta noted. “After more than a decade of war in Afghanistan,” he added, “I believe we have renewed those bonds for the 21st century.”

If the alliance can carry its solidarity forward, the secretary said, “we can realize our shared dream of a better and more peaceful and more secure world.”

Earlier today, after a meeting of NATO and troop-contributing partner nations, Rasmussen said that while the ISAF mission will end after 2014, a new, smaller NATO mission will take its place focusing on national and institutional level training. While he, like Panetta, said NATO ministers see the new mission organized regionally -- rather than limited to one central location -- the alliance has not yet determined any specifics.

But “Afghans can be confident our support will go well beyond the end of transition,” he added.

Biographies:

[Leon E. Panetta](#)

[Anders Fogh Rasmussen](#)

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[Photo Essay: Panetta Concludes NATO Meeting in Brussels](#)

[7. Kerry Travels to Europe, Middle East for Talks \(02-21-2013\)](#)

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State John Kerry, on his first international trip since becoming secretary earlier in February, will meet with world leaders for discussions on a wide range of issues, from Europe and Afghanistan to Mali and Syria and to Middle East peace.

Kerry will also meet with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov while in Berlin.

Kerry will visit nine nations in 11 days, according to State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland. Kerry will travel to the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar from February 24 to March 6.

Kerry will meet first with senior British officials in London before traveling to Berlin, where he'll discuss trans-Atlantic issues with German officials. While in Berlin Kerry will “exchange views with German young people on the state of European-American relations,” Nuland told journalists at the February 19 daily State Department briefing.

“His visit to Berlin will also be an opportunity for him to reconnect with a city in which he lived as a child,” Nuland said. Kerry lived in Berlin when his father served as an American diplomat stationed in the divided city.

Nuland announced February 21 that while in Berlin, Kerry will hold talks on the sidelines of his other meetings with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov.

“Secretary Kerry and Foreign Minister Lavrov will discuss a wide range of bilateral and international issues,” Nuland said, without offering specific details. It will be their first face-to-face meeting since Kerry became secretary.

In Paris, Kerry will meet with senior French officials to discuss cooperation in the international effort in Mali. European nations and the United States have supported the French-led intervention in Mali to drive insurgents out of the country's north. U.S. support to French forces has consisted of military airlift, refueling and other noncombat support.

In Rome, Kerry meets with senior Italian officials and is expected to participate in a number of bilateral and multilateral meetings with European allies to review the wider trans-Atlantic relationship and to discuss issues of global concern, Nuland said. Kerry will participate in multilateral meetings on Syria and with the leadership of the Syrian opposition coalition.

In Ankara, he will meet with Turkish officials to discuss strategic priorities — from ending the crisis in Syria to promoting regional stability, peace and security — as well as expansion of U.S.-Turkey cooperation, including counterterrorism cooperation, Nuland said.

“In Cairo, Secretary Kerry will meet with senior Egyptian officials, with other key political stakeholders, with civil society leaders and with the business community,” Nuland told journalists. “Among the themes will be encouraging greater political consensus and moving forward on economic reforms.”

Nuland said Kerry will also hold a one-on-one meeting with Arab League Secretary-General Nabil al-Araby to discuss “many shared challenges across the region.”

Kerry then travels to Riyadh to discuss U.S.-Saudi concerns and participate in a ministerial meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council nations. The council includes Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and Kuwait.

In Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, Kerry meets with senior officials to discuss continued close coordination. He concludes his trip in Doha, Qatar, Nuland said, where he will meet with Qatari leadership to discuss bilateral and regional issues of concern, such as Syria, Afghanistan and Middle East peace.
